

Bloodletting

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Bloodletting

by [CheesyJumpersandJam](#)

Summary

[IN PROGRESS]

A love letter in a corpse. A double-homicide as the response.

A new serial killer has chosen Virginia as its hunting grounds and Will must work to catch the killer before more blood is spilled. However, as the murders turn more gruesome and unnervingly more intimate, Will discovers he has much more to reveal than just a name.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Will's gaze is beyond the field of flowers, laid out all before them. His eyes see farther than any pair that watches him. The victim is young. Not yet twenty. Female. Black hair. Pale eyes. Paler now that rigor mortis had settled in her bones. She is impaled on a set of wide antlers, harshly pressing through her flesh. Puncturing lungs, her kidney, her intestines all mottled and ripped from the sharp prongs rising from her soft, cold belly and chest.

She is literally presented to them all on a golden plate with this grandiose display. It is horrifically similar to the Chesapeake Ripper's handiwork...yet... something is amiss.

Will circles the body, his eyes calculating and lit with a foreign light. There is something off about this macabre picture. The wounds don't fit the crime.

A glint of haziness before Will separates himself from Jack and the crew, closing his eyes and taking two deep breaths. He sees the pendulum swing across his vision. One. Two.

Three.

Will opens his eyes and sees the girl, writhing in obvious discomfort and sobbing uncontrollably. She is bound by the ankles, wrists tied behind her back, and her mouth emits muffled cries around the gag she is forced to suffer through. To Will's immediate right lay the antlers, already standing and fixed to the ground; a pedestal ready for the trophy.

"I take the bound girl and stab her twice in the chest." Will's body moves as purposefully and with as much dark intention as the murderer. He grabs the girl by the scalp and pulls her hair tightly, forcing her body to straighten out in attempts to alleviate the pressure. At this moment, Will raises his balled hand, the hunting knife tight in his grip and maliciously stabs her twice in the chest, strings of blood following the blade as it pulls out and reenters her flesh in quick succession. Her body buckles, a strangled choke rising from her throat as blood fills her lungs. It begins to spill out her mouth, her eyes wide and latched onto Will's face as she dies.

"I carry her dead body to the antlers..." Will lifts the girl over his shoulder, warm blood seeping through his shirt. He pauses in front of the open antlers, welcoming the sacrifice with an open mouth, malevolent fangs grinning back. "And I impale her." Will hurls her off his shoulders, using every muscle in his arms and back to slam her back into the set of antlers awaiting her arrival. A sickening crunch and crack indicate the body is anchored securely. The tips of the antlers break through her skin and reappear in the open air, red with her blood. They jut out her flesh, her eyes open and her chin tipped back to gaze, petrified, at the sky.

But Will knows it's not over. This killer was doing this for a very specific reason. This is a letter. A letter of adoration and admiration.

Will steps forward again, his hands fumbling in his pocket to take out a small scroll of paper, carefully wrapped.

"I carefully place the letter where I know the Ripper will find it. It's meant for him, after all." Will looks over the body. The mouth....the belly...the chest...the...

stab wounds.

Will forces his hand through the wound, ripping the skin further apart, his fingers sloshing around in the mess of punctured organs inside. Finally, the heart becomes tangible and Will pushes his fingers into the first chamber he can feel. He splits it open, depositing the letter safely there, nestled in with the black blood and sinews.

"I conceal the wound," Will harshly pushes the girl, tugging her in one direction and hearing her skin and flesh rip as the antlers drag and mask the wounds. "I want this letter to be found, but not by just anyone."

Will steps back, feels the stickiness of his hands and arms. The way his shirt clings to him and a clammy sheet of sweat and blood coats him. He feels how wrong but powerful this is. He closes his eyes again, and opens to them to the crime scene. His eyes rest over the wounds on her chest where he knows the letter will be found.

"This is my design."

Will's eyes flicker momentarily, a sudden wariness returning to him in rolling waves. He blinks, a shuddering breath releasing the tension from his body; the empathy. Then Jack's bulky form is beside him, and the waves crash against the rocky bluff.

"What did you see?" Jack's grim frown is taught and pulled thin across his face. The wrinkles formed in his face seem to reflect the depth of displeasure the man has for the bloody sight before them.

Will does not need to confirm the look on Agent Crawford's face. The severe tone he uses is evidence enough. Will knows what he has to say won't make anything better, but the letter must be recovered. "A poem."

"How poetic," the thick accented voice is easy to distinguish. Will's head turns a slight fraction to watch as Doctor Lecter approaches the body, hands clasped over his ever dapper jacket. Lecter stops alongside Will's other unoccupied shoulder with a charismatic smile, Jack and Hannibal forming almost a wall behind the Profiler. Only, walls didn't make Will feel any safer.

"Yeah, well this poem is a little hard to grasp," Will walks over to Price, the man confused by his sudden involvement.

Hannibal and Jack watch their colleague with interest, the former with an added dose of amusement.

"How do you mean?" Jack asks.

Will gloves his hands with a surgical pair he obtains from Price after rolling up his sleeves. "He put it inside her body."

“Where did he put it?” Hannibal steps forward, the concept obviously fascinating to the doctor and psychiatrist as he finds a better position to witness the reveal.

“Close to the heart,” replies Will, carefully inserting his fingers into the deepest wounds in the chest. The stab wounds. They were cleverly disguised by the repositioned placing of the body. The killer could nearly have gotten away. The message might have been delivered.

After a few seconds of plunging his fingers with as much care as he could into the chest cavity, Will is able to feel the smooth corner of the paper and pluck it from her heart strings. He slips the small scroll out from the chest wound, his hand returning black with congealed and deoxygenated blood.

“It’s been treated. And wrapped,” Hannibal examines the letter in Graham’s hand. It was treated. And it is indeed wrapped.

The paper is shiny, indicating either lamination or chemical treatment to keep the blood from ruining the words cautiously scrawled on the inside. What’s more interesting is what holds the scroll together. A small flower. Presumably white before it was stained with the victim’s blood, the small petals circled the yellow center.

“It is a Chrysanthemum,” Hannibal declares, approaching Will with Jack following closely behind.

“Chrysanthemum? This guy is leaving notes with flowers for the Ripper?” Jack’s incredulous look betrays the disgust in his mind.

“Not just any flower. The Chrysanthemum is known to symbolize rebirth and longevity,” Will inspects the flower closely. There appears to be no other clue inside the flower. It is slightly disfigured from its decided flowerpot.

“Will is correct. In most Asian countries the Chrysanthemum symbolizes life and rebirth, but this flower is white. It is a symbol of love and devotion. Loyalty and truth,” Hannibal’s smooth and rounded voice denotes his intrigue in the small scroll with the way he offers more possibilities to the meaning of this present.

Jack raises an eyebrow at the mentioned words of affection. “Why would the killer copy the Ripper and send him a flower that is supposed to represent honesty and faithfulness?”

“Perhaps the letter will enlighten us?” Doctor Lecter looks to Will expectantly, the Profiler awaiting Jack’s approval before he reads the blood-stained words. It comes.

Reaching into his front pocket and placing his glasses on his face, Will unravels the scroll and begins to read the words out loud.

“ Murders are red,

Corpses are blue,

Now she is dead,

Does she die, too? “

Will finishes the short lyrical script with a contemplative frown, his cloudy eyes swiveling from left to right as he reread the small inscription once again. And again. And again.

“He’s threatening to kill again,” Jack at last says.

“It would seem that way, yes. However, the killer provides no indication of how to stop that from happening,” Lecter switches his attention to the corpse, lifting the wrist with his gloved hand and checking the body for any suspicious marks or abrasions. “She’s been dead for twelve hours.”

The letter is short. Concise. Precise. There is a message there waiting to be understood. There is something in that letter the Chesapeake Ripper could decipher. What would a killer like the Ripper see in those words? What did Will have to do in order to see it, too?

“Whoever it is referring to, the Ripper knows her somehow. Her death must affect him in some way,” Will voices his thoughts out loud, more to be said in his throat but he just chokes on the words. He refrains from saying anything more until he knows it’s concrete. He meets Hannibal’s gaze for a furtive moment. He sees the man already watching him under those dark pupils that seem to mask emotions too well.

Will closes his lips.

“We’ll move the body to the lab. Run some more extensive tests. See what we find,” Price chimes in with his usual peppiness despite the somber circumstances. “Maybe she’s got more secrets in that heart of hers.”

The playful quip was meant to be just that, but it doesn’t amuse another soul that hears it. Jack’s stern gaze hardens and, quietly, Price lowers his eyes, makes a quick note on his clipboard, and wanders off.

“Anything else you can tell us?” Jack looks hopefully over at Will, but the man makes no other move other than to shake his head assuredly. Crawford’s broad shoulders stiffen visibly at the negative response. He lingers a moment, his feet firmly planted in the ground for a few silent seconds until he makes his way off the crime scene. “We’ll regroup at Quantico. I want a report on that body on my desk by tomorrow morning!”

Soon after Jack’s exit, Price and the other analysts follow. Then there is just Will and Hannibal who remain.

Will focuses on the letter in hand, still interpreting the words to make sense of it all. He couldn’t accept a version of events in which they were left completely to the mercy of the killer. That they must wait for another murder. And another. And another.

“Perhaps there is an anagram. A secret message in those words,” Hannibal speaks after a period of silence. He removes the latex gloves and pockets his hands in his expertly pleated pants.

“No,” Will furrows his brows, a thick mist hovering over the answer to this puzzle. He had only to remove the fog. He just couldn’t figure out how. “This was meant for the Ripper. This is an ode to him. A sign of admiration. Anagrams and word play don’t apply to the Ripper’s style. The Ripper only understands how to take a life and surgically remove organs. There is no poetry to how he kills.”

Perhaps if Will wasn’t so engrossed in the message in his hands, he’d have seen the message in Lecter’s grin. Aesthetic and soft to untrained eyes, it hides a sort of sadistic glee buried beneath.

How close Will is to solving this game of life, death, and blood. He is standing on the brink of destruction. Just one little nudge is all he needed. Such a thing is too tempting.

After all, Hannibal is curious to see what would happen.

“Whatever the message is of that letter, I think it best we prepare for the reply.”

Will froze, his eyes clearing as he slowly raised his gaze towards the psychiatrist, catching a glimpse of those obsidian pools before the well dressed man turned on his heel and walked past the yellow tape.

Will is alone. Alone with his thoughts and the cadaver. He likes it best this way. It leaves room to focus. Yet, he is anything but focused. His concentration jumps from theory to theory. From word to word.

Maybe this letter wasn’t a riddle. Maybe it wasn’t even a threat. All Will knew is that it ended with a question mark. A question. Does she die, too?

Does she?

Will sighs audibly. The smell of the corpse permeates the air and soon Will cannot detect anything but death. The signs. The undeniable signs.

He rolls the letter back into its original scrolled form, letting the Chrysanthemum dangle idly in the wind, its stalk tied into a ring to fasten the letter closed. Its dried considerably, and the faintest breeze loosens a paper thin crimson petal. A few more minutes and Will is certain it will disintegrate entirely. He cups his hands, keeping the small Chrysanthemum and the scroll intact as he returns to the group outside the yellow tape.

He passes the evidence onto another analyst who promptly places the objects in a sanitized plastic bag. Will begins to remove the gloves, watching as a stretcher is prepared. Someone accompanies them with a body bag.

Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It had to be late at night. The darkness shrouded the room in a thick, wool blanket. There was an undeniable chill that snuck beneath the covers. It had to be late at night.

Will shivered, pulling the comforter to his neck and struggling to remain in a restful state.

He recounted in the silence of restlessness the day before. After leaving the crime scene, he had followed the others back to Quantico; Jack would've wanted to hold a meeting right away.

Will joined everyone in Jack's office, lingering near the doorway and against the wall. Katz and Price were already standing around Jack's desk like faithful watchdogs and Lecter had taken a seat. They were in the middle of something by the time Will had arrived and all looked towards the newcomer with renewed silence. Will had the feeling he was interrupting. He hesitated taking another step in when Jack gave him a nod of permission.

"Will, please, come in. We need your input."

Will smiled meekly. Regardless of working with everyone many times before, Will was never enthusiastic about being sociable. It was one of his stronger weaknesses, a fitting oxymoron, he would admit. In fact, he *had* admitted it. Yet, Jack was persistent.

The FBI Agent raised his eyebrows and seemed to hang on the edge of a cliff, awaiting Will's move. Lecter watched with an unchanging expression, sitting with crossed legs and his clasped hands capping his knees. When Will finally did decide to enter the room, the conversation resumed as if nothing had happened.

"The victim has been identified as Kathleen Ledger. Seventeen years old. We found a match on the missing list. She had first been reported missing three days ago." Beverly passed around a photo of the missing girl and a photo of the victim for comparison. It was an unmistakable match.

"Three days?" Jack frowned. "Seems like an awful long time to hold someone hostage in this instance."

"There was a lot of thought put into this. The killer wanted to make sure everything was perfect. Three days is what he needed to execute his plan," Will's distinct voice earned the attention of everyone. All eyes looked to their empathetic Profiler, all looking eager enough to start taking notes if they could. Will felt the need to continue. "The murder was theatric. He couldn't afford to rehearse so he spent more time preparing. My guess is that the three days were devoted to presentation; the note, the flower, and the antlers."

“Not the girl?” Lecter leaned back in his chair, breathing in through his nose and giving him a contemplative tilt of the head. Will suddenly felt as if he were sitting across from the man, feeling the arms of the chair beneath his clammy skin as he stared him down in the solitude of Hannibal’s office.

“The killer isn’t like the Ripper. He doesn’t care about extracting organs or honoring the victims’ bodies. Our killer was focused only on reaching the Ripper. The victim was merely wrapping paper for the letter. A vase for the flowers.”

“Three days. That’s a clue,” Jack added. “She must have been kept somewhere for three days. Find where she’s been kept and we might find our killer’s lair. I want tests run on the body. Anything suspicious found on her, I want to know about it. Get me results on that letter and flower, too. I want to know what paper he used, where he got the flower, and what ink he used to write the letter with.”

“We’re on it!” Price and Katz gathered the pictures and returned them to the file before heading out the door. Katz offered Will a friendly smile on the way before disappearing with Price down the hallway.

Will started to follow them out the door when Jack called out to him. “Wait.”

Graham slowed to a stop and turned around gingerly. He didn’t like the sound of this, especially with Lecter sitting right there.

As if on cue, the doctor looked from Crawford to Graham and squirmed in his seat faintly, feigning a sensation of discomfort; something he never experienced. “Shall I go?”

“No. This concerns you, too, doctor.”

“And what is so concerning?” Will asked, hesitantly re-entering the room. His voice was sharper than he had meant--or had he? Every step was a step closer to a mist that clouded his senses. It gazed back at him with a reserved smile.

Jack raised a brow at the shrewd Profiler, but he obviously wasn’t impressed with the oblivious play. “I’ve decided to increase your mandatory visits to Hannibal’s office.”

That had not been the answer Will wanted to hear, even if he did have the sneaking suspicion it had something to do with the well-dressed elephant in the room.

“I’ve discussed this with Hannibal and Bloom. They both agree that you’d benefit from more consistent visits. If there is improvement, I may consider reducing the frequency. But until then, this is how it’s going to play out.”

Will was silent. His eyes scrutinized Jack’s sincere, yet unyielding expression. Lecter chose a facade much harder to interpret. He did not meet his gaze and Will was almost convinced the Doctor felt awkward in this situation. But intellect told Will that this was not true.

“Was there something I did that made you change your mind?” Will pocketed his hands, forcing a smile on his face that looked less than half-convincing.

Crawford sighed, leaning forward in his chair, placing his clasped hands over his desk and resting his elbows on the edge. "It has come to my attention that you haven't been as focused as of late--"

"Focused?" Will laughed. "I'm more focused now than I have ever been before. The Ripper has an admirer who is going to kill again. I can't afford not to be focused."

Jack looked displeased, but apologetic. "I'm sorry, Will. Alana said you've been acting more erratically than normal."

Will tightened his lips, resisting the urge to clench his hands into fists. He knew exactly why she'd say something like this, but it still irked him she took such drastic action because of it. It had been a moment of weakness. A moment in which Will had opened up to her and told her how he felt.

Look where that got him.

"And Lecter?" Will drew his fierce gaze to the doctor who, just at that moment, looked up at him. "What was Lecter's diagnosis?"

Jack did not object, though he looked increasingly unpleasant. Hannibal shifted in his seat to look Will more directly in the eye. No longer did he look abashed. He didn't look displaced at all.

"I witnessed you on several occasions absent-minded. It would not usually be so concerning, however, I tried to bring you back to the present by calling your name, but you did not respond. I once even touched your shoulder but you still did not react."

"I haven't been sleeping well," Will admitted. Lack of sleep was not a crime, but Jack and Hannibal were not fazed by the revelation. Lecter actually tilted his head and frowned.

"I assumed it was because of sleep deprivation. However, the severity of your episodes can be the results of many other causes. Stress and trauma can cause you to become more easily distracted, loss of alertness and senses, confusion, and instability."

There it was. The key word. Just the sound of it slithering through Hannibal's lips made Will freeze. What was perhaps more chilling was the fact he couldn't rightly deny that he wasn't unstable. Jack knew it. Hannibal certainly knew it, as did Alana and even himself.

It was no surprise that the recent string of murders had made Will more distant than usual.

More cryptic than normal. If Will wasn't already so introverted, this sudden development did not help.

"Trauma," Will growled. "What *possibly* could have traumatized me so much?"

Hannibal tilted his head in that way he did, the same look of non-judgement and professionalism blanketing all Will could perceive. "There are many things, Will."

And just like that, Will was assured that neither he or Lecter were talking about trauma.

Will had returned home after Jack won the battle. He was scheduled to meet with Hannibal twice a week.

As much time as that involved, Will could only find himself worrying about his dogs. Strangely, his initial distaste for the idea blurred into some other mundane reason and then it didn't seem to matter more than a daily nuisance.

But a nuisance nonetheless.

Will sighed, too frustrated about the day's events to even linger on them any longer. He turned over, his body resting on a sheeted mattress; he tossed the sheets and comforter off long ago.

Strings of thought tangled in his mind, flashing before his eyes like a plotting spider's web. Threads coiled around his head like boa constrictors, hissing whispers of misfortunes to come. Around and around they wrapped around the Profiler's tense body until he could barely breathe. Something akin to a noose tightened around his neck and his eyes watered as everything suddenly became so real.

He shot up from his bed, sitting rigid and breathing tight, fast gasps. A sickening iciness spread over his body, gluing itself to the beads of sweat twinkling over his brow and clavicle.

A whine preceded the familiar padding of paws approaching the bedside. A velvety, wet nose nudged Will's goose-skinned leg and two soft brown eyes peered up at him. Winston's ears were pressed down to his head, another whine of concern pushing air out through that nose pressed against his skin.

Will reached down and scratched the dog behind his ears, giving him a fond smile that was more straining than it should have been.

"Don't worry about me," he spoke softly to the dog whose eyes reflected the blue light streaming from the open window.

Those eyes snapped to the source of the ghostly light and Winston was suddenly half on the bed, ears craned forward and teeth bared as he barked frantically.

Will's heart skipped a beat, the dog's paws scraping their nails against his thigh as the dog continued to wildly snarl. Will jerked his head outside, squinting into the darkness. Then he saw it.

A figure.

His hands shot up to Winston's collar and neck fur, sinking his fingers into the soft pelt of the animal as it growled ceaselessly at the silhouette barely visible in the night. Terror gripped the Profiler's chest, keeping him in place. Keeping him staring out into the field where the figure stood.

His heart pounded. Blood drained from his face, from his fingers and toes. He could do nothing but watch. Watch as the figure seemed to shift. Seemed to split and morph into a horrific, spindly creature. A creature with spear-like antlers towering from its skeletal head.

Will's breath caught in his throat, his mind collapsing in on itself and he felt as if he were falling. Falling into nothingness even as his eyes continued to stare unblinkingly into that night.

Then he stopped. The spinning ended and he realized he had closed his eyes. He ripped them open and saw the same midnight rays filtering through the window. An empty field lit with a halo of blue.

His hands grasped nothing. His knuckles ached as he slowly lowered his arms, blood painfully rushing back into his fingertips. Winston was not there.

Panic flung Will from his bed, dragging him to the kitchen and only stopping when he saw the faithful dog lift its head from the floor where it had been laying peacefully. It tilted its head at Will. Utterly serene.

Will collapsed against the wall, a tortured sigh escaping his lips. He sank to his knees, his hands shaking uncontrollably. He pushed them onto his thighs to try and steady them. *Calm down* he repeated in his head. *Calm down. Just a dream. Just a dream...*

It was then Will felt the welts.

He breathlessly looked down to his bare thighs and lifted his trembling hands. Lines of red, swollen scratches met his eyes. He ran his fingers over them, feeling the raised, hot flesh of the cuts and the normal planes of his leg. This was real.

Not a dream.

Chapter End Notes

Hoping to update this soon.

Stay tuned and let me know what you think of it so far.

I promise more of our beloved cannibal and his wickedness is to come.

CJ&J

Chapter 3

AN: Sorry for the bit of a wait but here is the next chapter!

Enjoy! Feel free to leave me a comment with any thoughts/comments you might have!

-CJ&J

“Will?”

He felt himself take a sharp intake of breath before his stormy grey eyes flitted to the dark pair watching.

There was a pause. A small space of careful consideration before the smooth voice returned. “You seem distracted.”

The profiler slumped back in his chair with a sigh, running his hand over his heavy eyes. “I didn’t sleep well last night.”

“I certainly hope your restless night was not due to feelings of resentment towards the fact you appear before me today.”

The corner of Will’s mouth twitched as a soft snort escaped him. *No. That was not the reason.* “Actually, I hadn’t given it much thought after I left the base.”

“It relieves me to hear you say so. It would be counter-productive for our sessions to feel like a chore.” Hannibal crossed his leg over the other and slowly relaxed back into the chair, still maintaining impeccable posture. His dark eyes roved over Will’s face for a moment or two before his smile returned. “But I digress. Your sleepless state is not to be overlooked. Was there a reason for last night to be so unfruitful?”

Will’s eyes widened marginally as the dark figure flashed before his eyes, rising from the ground like weeds forcing their way through concrete, seeping through like blood from a gushing wound. “No.” He swallowed. “Nothing out of the ordinary.”

His eyes slowly lifted to peer into Doctor Lecter’s. Into Hannibal’s. He didn’t know why he couldn’t explain what happened last night. Why such a thing should never cross his lips. Like uttering its likeness to another would somehow make it more real. More...cold. Haunting. Alive.

Hannibal returned the gaze with his own imperceptible one. He could tell Will was hiding the truth. The way his mouth had sewn itself into a thin, straight line. The bobbing of his Adam’s apple. The searching in his grey eyes. Normally, Hannibal would’ve found this behavior to be quite rude. Staring into another man’s eyes, knowing he has just spoken a lie and then being

watched to see if the bait would be taken or brushed away like a starving dog that would take any bone thrown its way.

Hannibal was no dog.

And he preferred flesh.

Hannibal looked away--decidedly *chose* to look away. He would play this game. However, he would play by his rules.

“And what is ‘ordinary’, Will?”

“Is that a rhetorical question?”

Hannibal returned his unwavering gaze. His thin lips lifted at the corners in a ghost of a smile. “No. It is a prompt for an answer.”

Will’s hands grasped the ends of the arms of his chair, pulling himself onto the edge of the seat where he quirked an eyebrow. “I get the distinct feeling you’re trying to tell me nothing about my life is ordinary.”

A tilt of the head. “Perhaps. However, one may describe ‘ordinary’ as having dinner at the table by the fire. Another could say a marriage that lasts until death is the definition. Yet, it is rare that these aspects are ever found in a stranger’s life.” Hannibal watched Will’s reaction. A drifting gaze that seemed to fixate upon one thought. A connection with his words. A truth. “Tell me, Will. What do you imagine is ordinary?”

Raven-black hair and piercing blue eyes. Her pale face shone amber in the lights at night. He would have liked to believe her expression showed melancholy. It would have been easier, but Will was too good an empath to ever believe it was.

“I’m sorry, Will.”

Words. Laced with embarrassment. Her embarrassment. His humility. His melancholy.

“Something that can only be imagined.”

~

The green-gray of the fluorescent lights flooded the room. A fold in the plastic bag holding the Chrysanthemum caught the light just right, twinkling to tease the profiler from across the room. It seemed to beckon him forward. Twinkling, like someone’s eyes when their smile pushed their cheeks up. A devious grin.

“Nothing,” Katz yanked off the gloves and dumped them unceremoniously into the trash, albeit with a little more force than necessary. “Absolutely nothing. She’s cleaner than a bucket of bleach,” she crossed her arms.

“That in itself is a clue. This guy clearly knows what he is doing,” Zeller offered optimistically, but Katz just threw him a look with a quirked brow.

“Uh-huh,” she sighed.

It makes sense, Will thought. Unlike the Chesapeake Ripper, this killer had no need to lead the police on with purposely placed clues. The victim was purely a package for the letter and flower. An altar of worship and adoration. Sick fawning.

“What about the scratches on the scalp?” Zeller directed his hopes to Price who had his eyes pressed against the microscope lenses. “Something to go off of? Any samples?”

“Well, as far as I can tell,” Price leaned back, his usual sunny face had seemed to cloud over with some semblance of defeat. “The dirt in the cuts match the dirt from the scene. Although, her skin did seem to have traces of soap, but nothing specific enough to point in any direction.”

“Fuck,” Beverly expressed what everyone in the room seemed to be feeling. “The best we have right now is soap and the fibers from the rope he used to tie her up. That’s it.”

“What about the antlers.”

All eyes fixated on the profiler. “Wiped. Clean. Not a single print on it. Just the blood of Kathleen Ledger and the deer.”

“The deer?” Will repeated softly. “Sloppy.” Everything didn’t line up. The three other analysts in the room stopped their motions, watching closely as the profiler detached himself from the wall he was leaning on to the body in the room.

He approached her, his head tilting as his thoughts danced around in his brain. “Gloves,” he spoke softly. A pair of latex gloves entered his line of sight and he took them wordlessly. Slipping them on in silence untainted by even the slightest breath. Will gently pressed his hand to her side and lifted, revealing her back.

Her skin was shaded a dark, bluing purple, all the blood filtering down to her back as she had been left on the antlers when livor mortis had settled in. It was difficult to determine any out of the ordinary discoloration due to the darkened flesh. Any kind of marks left there before death would have been easily overlooked.

Every inch of her looked planned. Spotless. Marked only where she was meant to be marked. Cleaned everywhere else. A blank canvas aside from the otherwise deliberate strokes of blood-colored paint. Except for one.

Will’s heart began to race, his mind clearing of the fog. “Her planning was so perfect. She was handled with the utmost care and treated with an expertise and practice of someone who has kidnapped before,” he gently placed the body back to where it was, removing his hands before his eyes moved to the wall where the pictures of the antlers were. All side by side. Showing all the imperfections in this design. “He didn’t mean to hold her for three days.”

“How on Earth would you know that?” Katz unfolded her arms. She wasn’t accusatory. Her eyes were alight with expectancy.

“There are bruises on her back. Multiple points of pressure, but all symmetrical. He didn’t have the final piece of his gift. He kidnapped her first and realized the antlers he had initially were too small to support her. He must have tried at least two sets before he found the ones he used. He was rushed. Pressed for time. He didn’t even bother to clean the final set before he impaled her.”

“Doesn’t seem planned very well to me,” Zeller looked over the victim’s back, eyeing the hidden bruises himself. “This guy is more obsessed than we thought.”

Will’s eyes roamed over the pictures on the wall, the nagging in the back of his mind still eating away at him. There was something amiss.

“A perfectionist who made a mistake,” Katz muttered under her breath, reading Will’s thoughts outloud. “She was spotless but another piece of the puzzle wasn’t. Why wouldn’t he just kill her and start over clean? Why leave evidence of your mistake behind?”

“Maybe he did it on purpose,” Zeller countered but Beverly just shook her head.

“Incredibly unlikely. Many serial killers are known to have some kind of inferiority complex. A compulsive desire to show superiority over their victims. They have signatures. They’re very particular about what they choose to show you and what they don’t. This guy doesn’t strike me as someone who would purposely show his mistakes on a body when he could’ve just gotten rid of the evidence of his carelessness and started over with a new victim,” Beverly shook her head. “It just doesn’t make any sense.”

Will had lived in the murderer’s shoes. Impaled Kathleen Ledger on those antlers. Felt what he had felt. Thought the killer’s thoughts. He had not hesitated. He hadn’t detected any distress. There was no indecisiveness. There was nothing. Nothing but the wave of power igniting every nerve in his body with senseless haze. Like a drug crashing over him and drowning him into a state of delirium.

Will opened his eyes, unclenching his hand from the tight fist he hadn’t known he was making. A stinging pain sobered his thoughts. As he unfurled his fingers that trembled from the release of pressure, he uncovered four little crescent cuts.

Price sighed. Either to fill the silence or indicate the passage of time. “Well, that report is due any moment. We should get to Jack’s office before he pounds on the door.”

The feet shuffling out from the door was a silent agreement to the wise words and soon Will was left alone with a body and his solitary thoughts.

He looked over the board again, carefully memorizing every detail. Every notch in the antlers. Every stain of blood. Every bruise. There was something still out of place. A serial killer does not change his modus operandi overnight.

Motivation was Will’s specialty. To know what is inside a killer’s head was what he did for a living. Yet, having felt so sure the day before and so unsure the next aggravated the profiler.

He looked to the only other items in the room he hadn't already focused on: the flower and the note.

The flower was withering inside the plastic bag, still coated in blackened blood. Smudges of the same dark substance marked the laminated note. The words still ringing in his mind.

Does she die, too?

Will didn't know how long he had been staring at the words when the sharp, distinctive sound of heels against the concrete floors approached.

He smelled her perfume before her figure entered the room.

"I thought you might be down here since you weren't with the others."

Will said nothing, just gazed silently down at the ground. "There wasn't much to report."

Alana smiled faintly. "I beg to differ. I overheard them saying you discovered the bruises on the victim's back. I'd say that's a pretty big thing to report."

He sighed through his nose, regretting it the instant it happened as more of her sweet smelling fragrance attacked his senses. Made him want to reminisce. "It doesn't make us any closer to finding the killer," he shuffled his feet awkwardly, replacing the note onto the evidence table and hiding his injured hand at his side. His eyes recorded the marks on the floor.

He could sense her unease. The discomfort between them. He knew she could feel it, too.

"Will."

He froze at his name but refused to look her in the eye.

"Will, look at me," her voice was soft, but direct. He looked at her.

The distance between them shrank and her hands were suddenly touching the sides of his face. The warmth spreading along his cheeks melted the tension in his shoulders. He wanted so badly to lean into her touch and trace the backs of her hands with his fingers. His eyes stung at the thought. At this. At it all.

"Will," her voice was barely louder than a whisper. It could have been. She was so close he could feel her breath. "We need to talk about what happened."

Will's lips split into a broken laugh. "What's there to talk about?" his voice was foreign to his own ears. His thoughts so lost in the blue eyes before him.

Alana's smile faltered, but persisted on like a wounded soldier. "I care about you. More than you could ever know," her words trailed off as Will peeled her hands from his face, his breath ghosting over his lips in quivering huffs. "Please, listen to me, Will."

“Why did you come here?” Will’s eyes drifted down to his feet again, his arms folding over his chest as if to hide him from the world. To hide the tremble in his hands.

“Will, I told you. I care about you. I care about what happens to you. Just...just, please, look me in the eye.”

“I don’t need you to care about me,” Will’s heart pounded in his ears, thrumming in his chest. Painfully pressing against his ribs. His feet desperately ached to find an escape. To run and never look back, but he glued them to the floor, his knees shaking with the conflict raging on inside his entire being. “I’m fine.”

“No, Will, you’re not,” Alana reached out for him again and he recoiled as if he had been touched with a burning flame.

“Right. I’d forgotten how *unstable* I am.”

“Will, please.”

“No, Alana, *please*. I did what you recommended. I went to see Lecter today. I’m going to continue my sessions. I’m *managing*. I don’t need your pity or you to comfort me,” his tone had turned bitter and his eyes leveled with hers despite the stinging he felt when he looked at the hurt in her eyes. The embarrassment. “I understand completely. Unless you have any insight on the case then...then just leave me to deal with this,” his anger crumbled. His heart still ached to reach out to her and embrace her. To feel her warmth against him. But it could never be. She didn’t love him. She loved his gift. The idea of him.

“Excuse me,” he muttered on his way out of the room. The last traces of her perfume clinging in the air as he pushed open the exit, tempted to, but never once looking back.

Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

Hello all!

Man, it's been ages. Life has been busy but I've still been thinking about this story. I'm happy to say that I finally have another update! I hope the next chapter will come much more quickly than this one!

Enjoy! Things are finally starting to pick up.

And as always, please leave any comments/concerns you have!
-CJ&J

Fingertips traced the swollen lines drawn onto the planes of his thighs. The skin was no longer raised, but it still burned.

His heartbeat thudded erratically the longer he sought after the proof on his skin that what he had seen had not been a figment of his imagination. Not just a result of poor sleep and lack of focus.

He tugged the legs of his boxers down and ripped his hand away, clutching onto his scalp instead, burying his face between his raised knees and willing the uncertainty of it all to disappear from his life.

It had been a week since Winston's usually kind, amber eyes had snapped to the figure in the distance and Will had blacked out. Seven days since he had seen Dr. Lecter. He had feigned illness to squeeze his way out of their second appointment together. Jack hadn't been thrilled, but it wasn't difficult for Will's exhaustion and the slight trembles in his voice to convince him he needed a break. He may have lied about being physically sick, but the symptoms were very much real.

Seven days. Much of what he spent wrestling with his own sanity. And when he was not, he was staring into Alana Bloom's sad, crystalline eyes and begging her not to leave him. But the words couldn't get out, and he always left her behind in the morgue. Left her behind with dozens of dead bodies, yet he was always the one that felt truly alone. Pride swatted any attempts to pick up the phone and call her. Perhaps if she had been the one to press dial he may have answered. She had not.

Will had made sure he would not be scrutinized under the trained gazes of Lecter, Jack, or Alana this week unless necessary, but he could not bring himself to step away from the case for even a single day. He had checked in with Katz, Zeller, and Price and made his get away

with a copy of all files on hand and even phoned in to check up on any possible updates daily. Unfortunately, nothing so far had been uncovered.

Lifting his head, Will surveyed the room now decorated with evidence photos and reports laid methodically out on the floor and even on the walls. The first day of his supposed sick-leave, Will had dedicated a couple of hours to orchestrate this new interior design and had even snorted to himself when he discovered the similarity of his living room to those of obsessive killers and stalkers on TV shows. In a way, it wasn't so different. Except his target wasn't a harmless object of fascination and desire. No. His target was a predator, a killer, and as far from harmless as one could get.

One glance to the clock. 5:43A.M.

Sighing, Will got up from the bed and walked in a straight line to the one photo he couldn't seem to see. Could never fully grasp.

The poem.

It was the only part of this puzzle that was real. The only part that truly mattered. The rest was all mockery. Flattery. A shallow copy of the Ripper's work. All it told Will was that the copycat had been watching. Spectating the Chesapeake Ripper and feeding an obsession. The poem, however, was the copycat's reply.

His lips parted, silently chanting the words his mind had been puzzling since the day he first saw them. *Does she die--*

A sharp intake of breath. He wasn't sure he really heard it until he saw the dogs begin to crowd around the door.

Footfalls upon the creaky porch steps. Someone was here.

Unconsciously, Will took a hesitant step back. His eyes flitted from the door to the narrow strip of light streaming from between the blinds and the window frame. His pupils constricted painfully.

Three knocks. Not aggressive, but not shy. "Will?"

All at once, the buzzing in his mind and the lead-like weight on his feet seemed to lift. Before Will could even let go of the breath he hadn't known he was holding in his hand was already twisting the knob of the door. "What are you doing here?"

His lashes cast pitch black shadows on his maroon eyes. They did a quick sweep of the disheveled profiler before he made a reply. "May I come in?"

Nothing on Hannibal's countenance seemed to display any pity or surprise at Will's appearance or the tiny glimpse into the state of the living room. It was because of this that Will relented without further questioning and stepped aside to let Lecter in.

Neither man spoke for a moment. Lecter carefully maneuvered around the canines who excitedly ghosted the newcomer's movements with wagging tails and hanging tongues before

encountering the labyrinth walkway of files and photos on the floor.

Will watched cautiously from the entrance way to the kitchen, arms crossed over his thin T-shirt. It only just occurred to him that he was woefully under dressed for guests and shifted his attention over to finding something more suitable to wear.

Just as he spotted a pair of jeans and a flannel thrown over the back of a chair, Hannibal broke the silence. "Is there some place I could put this? I fear the dogs are too interested" he lifted the cloth bag in his left hand which Will had failed to notice at first. Hannibal's eyes dropped to the floor and then back up to Will still frozen mid step towards the chair "and I wouldn't want to accidentally interfere with your work." Lips pulled up into a polite smile, but it was sincere enough.

Will nodded and stretched one leg out to plant his foot between two files and reached out to grab the cloth bag from the outstretched hand. Just as he wrapped his fingers around the straps of the bag and began to step back, he noticed some resistance as Lecter's fingers had not yet unfurled. His eyebrows knitted and Will looked up at the other man's face to realize that Hannibal was not looking at him. His heart banged hard against his chest as he followed the man's gaze to the red lines peeking out from under the end of his boxers.

Heat rose to Will's face and he instinctively recoiled. Expecting and preparing to be met with some resistance, Will's arm yanked the bag away with more force than necessary and nearly lost his footing against a slippery photo on the floor when Hannibal's fingers willingly parted with the bag.

Will's lungs filled with air as he braced himself for a fall. He tensed as one foot slid out from under him and breathed out shakily when two hands clamped themselves around his ribs. He allowed himself to go limp for a moment, his knees too shaky and unreliable to pick himself back up. His knuckles had gone white around his vice-like grip around the bag's handles and his eyes glued themselves to the floor. They dared not meet the dark pair that he could feel watching his every move. Every pulse.

Suddenly, driven by embarrassment but mostly uneasiness from being pinned under a microscope, Will shook himself out of Lecter's grasp and retreated to the chair where he unceremoniously dumped the bag onto and hurriedly dressed himself. His back turned to Hannibal the whole time.

Another period of unnerving silence fell between the two. Even after Will had fully dressed and crossed his arms across his chest in a self-comforting gesture he did not turn to face Lecter. His shoulders rose and fell unevenly, frozen in a hunched state. To Hannibal, it felt as if he were watching a wolf in the distance confront an enemy in his territory. The breathless moments before the decision between fight or flight was made. The moments where tension hangs in the air as thick as smoke wafting from a nearby fire. Only this wolf wasn't facing anything. This wolf was alone.

Or so the wolf thought. Desperately wanted to believe.

"Are you hurt, Will?"

The profiler's back stiffened ever so slightly. Anyone else would have just seen a tremble. "To what injury are you referring?" Will's voice was low and breathy, undoubtedly fighting to keep his tone even.

Hannibal was admittedly surprised, even pleased that Will did not even attempt deception or play the oblivious part as he had done in their session a week ago. The psychiatrist had prepared for more evasive replies to his questions. He had grown quite accustomed to Will's mannerisms and dislike for closeness. He was still not trusted enough by the profiler to be fully confided in. However, Will had yet to learn that Hannibal did not need words to know exactly what was running through his mind. He didn't need anything. He knew Will. Knew him more than anyone could know. What simply fascinated Hannibal was that somehow Will still managed to surprise him. It was thrilling.

"Come," Hannibal edged around the sea of files and carefully and calmly closed the distance between them. "The food will go cold if we don't eat." He reached for the bag left on the chair and made his way towards the kitchen, paying no mind to the fact that Will had still not moved.

He began to set the table in nonchalant fashion, neatly folding the napkins and placing the utensils on top. He drew the blinds up from the window, making a content sound when he felt everything was in satisfactory condition. He had just finished pouring steaming coffee into two cups when he looked up and offered a benign curl to his lips. "Ah, Will. Please sit and eat."

The profiler's arms had returned to his sides, though his fists had yet to unclench. It was a sorry attempt to reset the scene. To return to a shred of normalcy and act like everything was fine. He walked normally and sat down in the most appropriate of ways he deemed apt for this situation, but he still could not look Hannibal in the eye. A casual facade with cracks at the foundation.

Hannibal did not press. He would allow Will this small comfort for now. Why rush into things when you could savor it slowly.

"Omelette. With fresh spinach, mushrooms, and andouille sausage."

Will swallowed. "Smells great. Sorry for shaking it up."

The other's eyes gleamed. "There is no need to apologize. Lucky for us, this dish is also delicious scrambled."

Will huffed at that. There wasn't much mirth in it, but Hannibal viewed it as a small victory anyways. "There is no need to fret, Will. Food is best enjoyed in silence and with patience." Hannibal took a small bite and breathed in languidly. "There will be plenty of time to talk afterwards."

Will offered no response. He gingerly picked up his fork and continued to take small, slow bites.

Their meal continued on in this way for a while. The omelette did indeed start to cool and it was only out of respect for the artful taste that Will ate faster to enjoy it the way it was intended. If he had it his way, he would have taken all day. Although, there was a certain, special pain in prolonging the inevitable that irked the profiler the entire wait. At this point, he supposed he could endure just a little more humility so that he and Hannibal could go their separate ways in the very near future.

With one final sip of his coffee, Will placed the cup down on the table and at last met Hannibal's eyes.

"You never answered my question," Will started.

Hannibal pushed his plate to the side and placed his clasped hands on the table. "I assumed you would have no trouble guessing."

"Our appointment today isn't until the evening. I had plenty of time to show up."

"And plenty of time has passed."

Will lifted his back from the chair and leaned forward, matching Lecter's challenge. "I haven't been feeling well. That's not a crime."

"I wasn't implying a crime was committed. Nor that you are guilty of something."

"Housecalls at 6 in the morning aren't exactly warranted for the innocent."

A hint of jest was snuck into Hannibal's tone "I assure you, Will. If anyone is to be found guilty of something it is my own possession of concern for a friend."

"Patient," Will corrected, pouring himself another glass of coffee. Had he not averted his gaze, the slight tinge of displeasure in Hannibal's face might have come to light.

"If you wish. However, Will, I do request that, whether you view me as a friend or just your psychiatrist, I am an open ear. Jack may have contracted me, yes, but we do not always see eye to eye. I fear he does not fully understand the extent of what he asks of you." He paused but Will made no motion or inclination that he had anything to say. He instead gazes deeply into his coffee, turning the cup little by little with no thought of pattern. "I am here to help, Will. To be the buffer between you and the abyss. I won't let you fall in, but I need to ask something of you."

Will's hand stilled and he slowly looked up.

"I must ask that you give me a chance to earn your trust."

Hands quivered against the dying warmth of the thermos cup. *How can I trust when I can't even trust myself.*

He must have drifted afar in his own troubling thoughts for when he returned to the sound of Hannibal's lowered voice he was taken aback by the intensity in the gaze that watched back.

“I feel I’ve answered your question. Now it is time for you to answer mine.”

Will coiled his fingers tighter around the cup.

“Are you hurt, Will?”

A shaky, broken laugh tore out from Will’s throat. He ran his hands over his face and dragged the fingers down his skin. His stubble prickled the palms of his hands and he could feel the well of heated tears building in his eyes. He blew out another shuddering breath and regained some semblance of composure before he forced his hands on the table top to steady the trembling in his fingers.

“I’ve had the same dream.. No.. not a dream. A feeling. I always wake up disoriented. I don’t know where I am at first but when I finally do catch my bearing I...” a hitch in his breathing, tears are starting to spill even after he tries so hard to fight them away. “I got the scratches a week ago after my dog accidentally nicked me with his nails. Every time I wake up it... It’s like they’re fresh.”

He watched Hannibal for any trace of disbelief. Any trace of shock. But the man was just too unreadable and Will’s own doubt was clouding his own ability to even care. Eventually the tears misted his vision too much to even see and he absent-mindedly planted the palms of his hands on his thighs which still burned and ached. Which had been bleeding when he woke up earlier that day at 3:00A.M. Out of his bed and in the field next to his house with nothing but his boxers, t-shirt, and the poem.

End Notes

I've always loved the show and I am still so grieved that it had to end. So as a way to console myself, I have found a way to revitalize the plotting darkness in the form of my own sick, twisted tale involving all our favorite characters. Get ready for this ride.

As always, feel free to leave me some comments. I love to hear what you guys think.

CJ&J

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!